

Occupational Health Branch Occupational Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

LEAD AND YOUR HEALTH

Lead is not an essential (necessary) element and serves no useful purpose in the body. Low exposures, that in the past were thought safe, are now considered hazardous as new information emerges about the toxicity of lead.

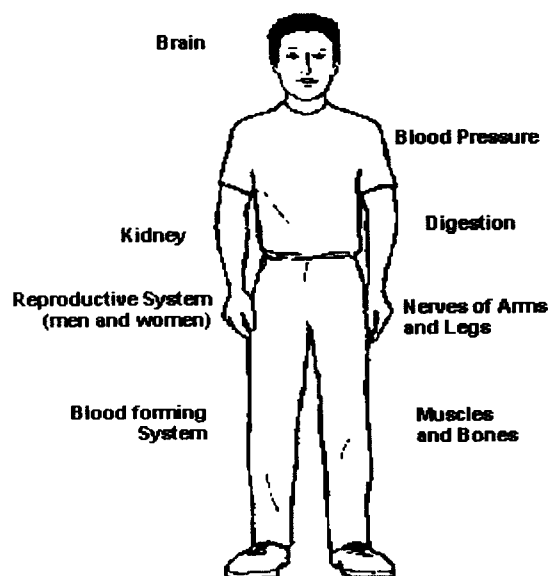
Lead enters the body by breathing or swallowing lead dust, fume or mist. Lead is absorbed into the blood-stream and distributed throughout the body. The lead that is not excreted right away is stored in soft tissues and bone. Eventually 90% or more of the lead body burden is accumulated in the bones and may stay there for years. Body stores of lead are gradually released back into the bloodstream over time.

Many parts of the body can be affected. An additional concern for pregnant women is that lead easily crosses the placenta and can harm the developing child.

You can be poisoned by lead and yet have few or no obvious effects! It is important to realize that lead can cause damage to your body without your knowing it. Damage can be permanent.

Some individuals may experience symptoms when their blood lead levels reach around 25 µg/dl; others may have much higher lead levels yet have few or no symptoms. Symptoms, if present, may include any of those listed below. In addition, severe lead poisoning can result in convulsions, delirium, coma and even death. The symptoms of lead poisoning may be confused with other health conditions.

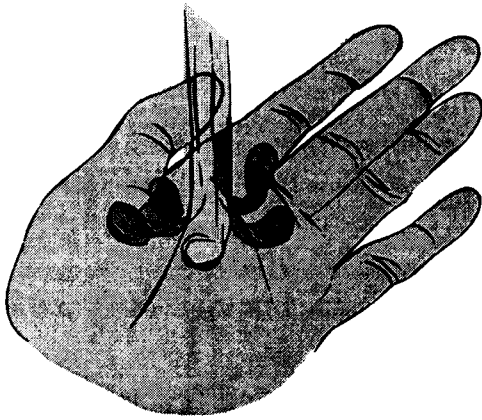
BODY SYSTEMS AFFECTED BY LEAD



Possible Signs and Symptoms of Adult Lead Poisoning

(Mild to Moderate Toxicity)

- Headaches
- Being forgetful, memory loss
- Nausea
- Persistent fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Weight loss
- Feeling weak
- Irritability, nervousness
- Anemia
- Clumsiness, lack of coordination
- Muscle or joint aches
- High blood pressure
- Shaking hands or head
- Metallic taste in mouth
- Kidney damage
- Dizziness
- Loss of appetite
- Decreased sex drive
- Difficulty concentrating
- Stomach aches
- Infertility
- Feeling depressed
- Constipation
- Pregnancy problems



Handwashing

Proper and frequent handwashing is the best way to avoid lead contamination. Hands typically play a significant role in cross-contamination.

Before washing your hands, remove rings and other jewelry that may otherwise trap dirt and germs, keeping you from cleaning all surface areas of your hands.

Moisten your hands under warm, running water from the sink.

Remember that water alone is not enough to remove lead. Use about a teaspoon of liquid soap when possible. If you use bar soap, save it in a soap dish that allows excess moisture to drain so a "bacterial soup" does not form.

Spend at least 15 to 20 seconds working up a good lather, preferably using liquid soap. Pay particular attention to the fingers, the spaces between them and under your nails.

Rinse all the soap off your hands with warm, running water. Position hands and fingertips downward, so the rinse progresses from the elbow or forearm to fingertip.

Avoid contact with potentially contaminated surfaces, such as sink or faucet handles, which can result in cross-contamination. If a faucet is used that requires full grasp of the faucet handle, leave the water running after rinsing hands. After drying hands, grasp the faucet handle with the used paper towel and turn off the water.

Dry your hands, using disposable paper towels which can help you wipe off and throw away the lead, rather than a communal cloth towel which can harbor lead or bacteria that will re-contaminate hands.